

## AN ASYLUM IN IRELAND, 1872

Having at this time received an invitation from the Irish Dispensary Medical Officers Association to address them at the College of Physicians in Dublin, I did so, when Sir Dominic Corrigan, Bart, M.P., was in the chair; and I afterwards spent a very pleasant week there, visiting the North and South Dublin Workhouses, the latter having 4,000 inmates, with a large staff of visiting physicians and surgeons, besides resident medical officers. It is one of the finest hospitals in Dublin, and the arrangements for the efficient treatment of the sick poor were in the highest degree creditable to the Irish Poor Law, now the Local Government Board.

I also visited the Richmond Lunatic Asylum, situated on the outskirts of Dublin, at that date under the superintendence of Dr. Lalor, who I understand, was the first physician who introduced vocal and instrumental music as a means of relieving the insane. There I witnessed one of the most extraordinary sights it was ever my lot to see. I will give a sketch of the tableau. In the foreground sat a young lady discoursing most eloquent music on a harmonium, immediately behind her there stood some young Irish women, three or four of them, singularly beautiful, with music in their hands, accompanying her; behind them were older women, and then on to the old and weird, all joining most heartily in the performance. The fringe of this female gathering of nearly 100 performers were harmless imbeciles and idiots. I stood and listened some moments whilst this singular performance continued. I was so struck with the beauty of one of the Irish girls that I asked her history, when I was informed that her condition had been induced by a disappointment in a love affair. It was the old story of love followed by desertion, and she had been admitted some six months before in a state of maniacal excitement. She was too young and altogether too pretty to be an inmate of a lunatic asylum. Dr. Lalor also showed me a typical case, exhibiting the truth of the opinion I have long held, that of all the forms of insanity, none are so uncertain of having been really cured as those which have exhibited symptom of homicidal or suicidal violence. The patient in question had been admitted when suffering with a homicidal tendency but had steadily

improved, and his name was on the list of those to go before the Visiting Committee for discharge on probation, when a startling incident occurred. He had secreted one of the knives used in the asylum about his person, and he had, when unobserved, whittled away the thick, blunt portion used in the asylum, until he had given it a sharp cutting edge, from handle to point; when, raising his right leg up, he cut through the calf down to the bone, severing the muscle completely. This patient, Dr. Lalor told me, had been employed on various offices of trust, and that he was commonly considered to be completely cured, and altogether harmless. I obtained one of the old knives used in this asylum, had it copied, and, having got the sanction of the Board for getting several, used them all the time I was at the Westminster Union, in the male and female wards. The cutting edge was about two inches in length, but the rest of the knife was about the twelfth of an inch thick. It was impossible for lunatics to do any harm either to themselves or others with such knives.

Joseph Rogers: *Reminiscences of a Workhouse Medical Officer*. London, Unwin, 1889, pp. 108-110.

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*E R R A T U M*

In the February 1976 issue, page 262, the sentence beginning on the 14th line should read as follows: 2) If added to the curriculum, the preceptorship program should be an elective for all medical students and should be either an addition to the present curriculum, a replacement for outpatient ambulatory care or community medicine, or simply an alternative elective,